MATWATCH

213 PINE HILLS AVE. AUBURN, AL. 36830 (205)826-7522

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STEVE'S SIDELIGHTS
By Steve Beverly

OKAY, GUYS....last week, we looked at our "Best of the First Half of '88" candidates. This time out, we'll balance that with a review of the seamier side of the mat from January to June. But remember: as fast as this business changes, every nominee may change by Yule. And, again, remember we stick primarily to U.S. organizations:

WORST WRESTLER OF THE YEAR---Dusty Rhodes, NWA. Look, I sincerely appreciate what this man has meant to the sport, particularly in the '70s. But his match against Barry Windham last Sunday night has sealed it with me. RUNNER-UP: Andre the Giant, WWF. For a guy whose best move all year was the 2x4 bump from Jim Duggan. Don't expect Andre in any Walkathons.

DEVALUATION OF THE YEAR---The Road Warriors, NWA. Why? Why? Why? After the screwup at last year's Starrcade, JCP has done enough to make these guys leave. Was that their intent to save money? RUNNERS-UP: Brad Armstrong/Tim Horner, NWA. Brad is capable of some of the best matches in the country with Ric Flair if he were so used and Horner is a quality tag wrestler. In one year from UWF tag champs to The Invisible Express.

WORST TAG TEAM---Soldad Ustinov & Nick Busich, Southern. Watching them at the WATL Wrestlethon was like eating a raw oyster. RUNNERS-UP: Wahoo McDaniel & Baron Von Raschke, AWA. They are to tag team wrestling what Elizabeth Taylor is to fidelity.

WORST LEAD ANNOUNCER---David Crockett, NWA. As someone once said, "Richard Nixon had his Watergate...Jim Crockett has his brother." RUNNER-UP: Rod Trongard, AWA. This guy is enough to make Gorilla Monsoon sound like Al Michaels.

WORST COLOR COMMENTATOR---Steve Williams, Clash of the Champions II. Poor Steve sounded like he'd been to the George Steele School of Elocution at this one. RUNNER-UP: Missy Hyatt, Continental. I love looking at her but Missy whines so much she makes me want to go listen to Roy Orbison records.

WORST MANAGER---Downtown Bruno, currently Memphis. Has there ever been a more sleazy looking, overbearing character? RUNNER-UP: (tie) Sir Oliver Humperdinck and Frenchy Martin, both WWF. Has anyone figured out what these guys do?

WORST SUPERCARD---Wrestlemania IV, WWF. Strictly for product delivered versus product promised. RUNNER-UP: Bunkhouse Stampede, NWA. A rerun of "My Mother, the Car" was more entertaining than this show.

WORST TV SHOW---AWA CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING, ESPN. It doesn't have the worst production values. But Trongard, Larry Nelson and The Big K sure make me want to take a dose of Maalox. RUNNER-UP: INTERNATIONAL ALL-STAR WORLD WRESTLING, WMAZ, Macon, Ga. Any show featuring the legendary Randy Hogan as lead babyface...well.....?

WORST ANGLE---The Midnight Rider Returns, NWA. It took Gene Autry longer to ride into the sunset in his old movies and he could sing better, too. RUNNER-UP: King Haku, WWF. A lot of others tempted me, but I've rarely watched 12 minutes of as much crap as this.

DISAPPEARING ACT OF THE YEAR---Larry Zbyszko, NWA. Is the chant, "LARRY SUX," now part of wrestling nostalgia? RUNNER-UP: (Tie) Brian Adias, World Class, and Ole Anderson, NWA. And neither of these guys were put on the 60-day disabled list. Oh, that's another sport.

WORST TURN---Ron Simmons, NWA. When he showed up in Alabama doing his Ernie Ladd imitation, I realized they forgot to tell us about this on TV. RUNNER-UP: High Chief Afi, WWF. I know people who care more about Black Bart matches than this situation.

WORST CAREER MOVE---Billy Jack Haynes, OWF. B.J. has discovered starting one's own wrestling promotion is like having 10 kids: it makes for a great family portrait but it sure drains the pocketbook. RUNNER-UP: Greg Valentine, for staying with the WWF. The money, I'm sure is too good, but this guy needs a fresh focus.

WORST FEUD---Midnight Rider vs. everybody, NWA. I've never seen any feud kill momentum (like this group had after Clash I) any quicker in wrestling history. RUNNER-UP: (tie) Sputnik Monroe vs. Billy Wicks, Memphis, and Mr. Wrestling II vs. Buck Robley, Southern. I have to give Sputnik an award for old-times' sake and as for II-Robley, don't blame II. I simply know of people who get more intense over an episode of "Mr. Belvedere" than over Robley. Zzzzzzz.

WORST EXECUTIVE---Jim Crockett, NWA. This one is not easy for me because I am still fond of this group. But with the many, many problems in the first two quarters of '88, the man at the top has to take the heat. RUNNER-UP: Verne Gagne, AWA. In principle, Crockett is a much superior executive, but I'll give Verne a slight edge just for letting Jerry Lawler and Memphis control the AWA title.

WORST MATCH---Mr. Big vs. Ricki Starr and Tim Patterson, WATL Wrestlethon. I don't believe shock treatments or drinking sour milk could be as terrible. RUNNER-UP: Anabolic Warrior vs. Hercules Hernandez, Wrestlemania IV. I thought this was a Nancy Reagan public service message for "SAY NO TO STEROIDS."

Again, remember, this is just my humble view and yours is equally as valid. So, I want to hear from you fellows. Send your opinions to MATWATCH at 213 Pine Hills Ave., Auburn AL 36830. I'll look forward to them.

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COMINGS & GOINGS

A few footnotes on the Bash PPV...the fans at the live show apparently felt it was a great show, but were disgusted with the Flair-Luger ending....Joe Pedicino says he felt JCP "shot itself in the foot."....that ending was merely a variation on the Flair-Rhodes match at Starrcade '84 when Joe Frazier played the Maryland Athletic Commission by stopping the thing because Dusty was bleeding....JCP may be able to milk a few more Flair-Luger revenge matches in the fall, but I'll propose my own Starrcade scenario next week.

A well-placed source told me last week that some Titan wrestlers on balloon payment contracts are receiving $75 pay nights because crowds outside of Madison Square Garden have dropped so sharply.

Titan's "Unconventional Special" from 8-11 (EDT) tonight on USA will probably be good...but don't expect it to be much more than an expanded version of Prime Time Wrestling.

Expect a once-heralded NWA star to make the jump to Continental if Crockett makes his balloon payments. This scenario could change, however, if Ted Turner finally buys out JCP.

Finally received a logical explanation for Ric Flair doing a job for Brad Armstrong in Montgomery on 6/20. It was Flair's idea. My info is that Ric wanted to give Brad a boost in case he leaves the Crockett group. Flair is one of the best-liked guys in the business and believes in "taking care" of people he believes are deserving.

Continental is having talks with Bam Bam Bigelow about coming in to feud vs. Humongous which may mean Titan has about closed the door on Bam as a major star. Seems a sad tale considering he was one of the standouts of last November's Survivor Series. Brian Pillman of Calgary Stampede is also getting a long look by the CWF.

Eddy Mansfield, the former Continental Lover, who blew the lid on the sport on 20/20 back in 1985 is now selling securities in New York City. He recently visited his home in Columbus, GA...and says he was interviewed for 20/20s 10th Anniversary special in June but the spot was cut. Eddy told reporter Sam Hall he doesn't even keep up with pro wrestling today.

The Bash national buy-rate looks as though it will hit five per cent, better than expected, and apparently impressed even the folks at Titan.

Terry Taylor is already doing jobs in the WWF---mostly for Tito Santana, so that means Taylor probably isn't a babyface as expected.

Reader Max Lide has panned the Gordon Solie Florida Championship TV show, saying it's "so poor you don't even want to see a tape of it." But I do want to see it at least once.

Owen Hart is already reportedly unhappy at wearing a mask as The Blue Angel in the WWF. (Cont. on Page 4)

PROMOTER'S PROFILE:
Continental

If one had to theorize on four quality ways to kill a wrestling promotion, one might sav: (1) showcase weak talent; (2) feature stale talent; (3) unimaginative use of television; and (4) egocentric booking. As of February of this year, I would have considered Continental Championship Wrestling, then headquartered in Birmingham, as guilty of the first three and under suspicion of the latter.

Not all of it was attributable to Ron Fuller. Until early 1987, Continental still operated as an NWA affiliate and heavily promoted its state and regional champions for shots at Ric Flair. The Bullet (Bob Armstrong) and Wendell Cooley both put forth respectable efforts against Flair in 1986, thanks largely to Flair's sales jobs. Jim Crockett's severing of relationships with virtually all the old NWA alliances reduced Continental to the level of other small independents. Efforts to attract Nick Bockwinkel and later Curt Hennig to the territory for AWA title defenses failed.

But after Kevin Sullivan's departure with the New Guinea Headhunters in early '87, this group looked like the same 15 or 16 wrestlers week in, week out. I often paralleled them to a class of sixth-graders who tire of each other by the first of May and the teacher is tired of looking at them, too.

The dearth of talent-sharing began to stymie this group and then, in an apparent act of desperation, too many turns were employed. Tom Prichard made four heel-to-babyface-and-back turns in 18 months, Tony Anthony was used as a face for a while, Robert Fuller and Jim Golden recovered from "injuries" and went fan favorite then re-villainized seven months later, Larry Hamilton was used as face and heel, and even Wendell Cooley joined the heel "Stud Stable," but "rehabilitated" within 30 days which further lessened the credibility of the turn. Even the most innocent mark would have appraised this bunch to be the most schizoid since the group therapy sessions on the original "Bob Newhart Show."

Enter David Woods, a second-generation broadcaster. Woods owns WCOV-TV, a fine independent station in Montgomery. His father is an Alabama and group station owner and pro wrestling is not a novice idea to the Woodses. For years, matches of the old Southeastern and Gulf Coast territories were taped at Charles Woods' WTVY in Dothan. John Goss, WSFA's own Bob Howell, Charlie Platt and Gordon Solie have all made the weekly trek to the Dothan studios.

Suddenly in the late winter, the Continental credits said the organization was A DAVID WOODS COMPANY. Woods privately told people his wrestling group could potentially be more profitable than his television station. How, we wondered?

Woods subtly began to demonstrate what may one day become a textbook for closing Death's Door to any wrestling promotion. First, a decision was made to affiliate with the AWA to at least have a world championship for the talent to promote. Second, he expanded his on-air promotion for Continental: increasing the number of wrestling shows on WCOV and buying spots in virtually all rival promotions' shows across the state to promote the group.

Next, and perhaps the catalyst for this group's resurgence, Eddie Gilbert was hired as booker. Gilbert had demonstrated a propensity for creative angles in his UWF days and he has one of the freshest approaches to television of anyone in the business.

Gilbert's hiring has led to a virtual farewell party for most of the old crew except for Tom Prichard, Anthony, and the Southern Boys. But as opposed to firing everyone at once as Vince McMahon did when he bought out Georgia Championship Wrestling in 1984, Gilbert's moves have been subtle and angles have been constructed to give fans a reason to care about the new talent.

A new Lord Humongous, a young and talented Shane Douglas, a new identity for Pez Whatley, a "Gomer Pyle" adaptation, and the return of Austin Idol have put fans back into seats across the territory.

Plus, Gilbert attracted the brightest young talent in the business today: Paul E. Dangerously, who not coincidentally does the best Roddy Piper act in the U.S.

The TV production has improved markedly in the last two months, even though work still needs to be done on lighting techniques. But word is filtering around that Gilbert eventually wants to duplicate what Bill Watts did with the UWF (except for selling to Jim Crockett). With David Woods' money and TV savvy behind him, don't bet against it.

I REMEMBER....
The Torres Brothers

My first full year as a mark was beginning in late 1965. Lou Thesz would soon lose the NWA title to Gene Kiniski. Jack Brisco was still in college at Oklahoma. Buddy Fuller was the Georgia heavyweight champion.

That November, a Latin twosome invaded the Peach State from California. In a territory led sporadically by Fuller, Ray Gunkel, the Assassins, Haystacks Calhoun, Dr. Jerry Graham, Freddie Blassie, and Sputnik Monroe, the closest to an ethnic sensation had been Louie Tillet.

Enrique and Alberto (and later Ramon) Torres changed all that. Within two weeks, the Torres Brothers began establishing a workrate that would make Al Perez look like a jobber. Lightning-fast and with more skill moves than any team I have ever seen to this day (including the speed of the Rock 'n' Roll, Midnight, Fantastics variety), the Torres clan immediately defeated The Infernos for the Southern tag team belts and later tacked on four reigns as the NWA world tag team champions, along with two as Georgia titleholders.

Two of their classic moves would heighten four-in-the-ring activity...and I've seen no teams use these moves in years. One, the boomerang, was a catapult move that would hurl an opponent in a springlike motion into another Torres' fist or the ringpost. The rowboat was like a double Indian deathlock in which the legs of all four men would be entwined, but every time the two Torres brothers would simulate a rowing motion, it pained their foes' knees and ankles.

In their three-year reign over Georgia wrestling, the Torres brothers won loser-leave-Georgia matches against the Infernos, the Medics, Butcher-Mad Dog and Stan Vachon, Krusher Kowalski & Black Jack Daniels, Rip Hawk & Swede Hanson, the Gauchos, Lars and Gene Anderson, Oki Shikima & the Mighty Hercules (Bobby Graham), the Von Brauners, the Red Raiders (Dick Dunn & Rip Tyler) and the original Garvin Brothers, Ronnie & Terrence.

Enrique gave way as Georgia booker in 1969 when Tom Renesto (Assassin #1) reclaimed his share of the promotion. But not before he had introduced Tim Woods to the NWA as Mr. Wrestling.

Unquestionably, Mr. Wrestling II is the most enduringly popular Georgia performer, but for tag teams---the name Torres is as synonymous in Georgia as crackers.

M A T W A T C H S U B S C R I P T I O N S

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PLEASE ALLOW 14-21 DAYS FOR YOUR ORDER TO BE PROCESSED.

TV TEMPO (Weekend of July 15-17)

(CONTINENTAL) - Austin Idol wins over Jerry Lawler by DQ in AWA title match when Eddie Gilbert burns Idol; The D.I./Detroit Demolition retain CWF tag title over Tom Prichard/Willie B. Hert (Pez Whatley) when Tony Anthony slugs Bambi and Prichard is counted out for chasing Anthony; Mr. Olympia takes DQ over Ken Wayne when Wayne and Nightmare #3 double on Olympia and unmask him as Jerry Stubbs; Wayne and Danny Davis pull out of Aug. 22 "Road to Birmingham" CWF title tourney for as-yet unspecified match. Joe Pedicino guests.

(WORLD CLASS) - Terry Gordy pinned John Tatum; The Simpsons knocked off Tatum & Jack Victory; Michael Hayes won over Buddy Roberts in a pole match; Roberts used the Ken Wayne-Danny Davis Continental sucker angle on Hayes.

(WWC) - Invader I pinned Super Black Ninja for the WWC TV title; Bobby Jaggers gave host Mike St. James a "D-minus in the Bobby Jaggers School of Wrestling Knowledge."

(INTL. ALL-STAR WORLD) - Ted Oates & R.D. Swain defeated The Russian Renegade & The Redneck; Bambi retained her "international ladies title" against Peggy Lee Leathers.

(AWA) - John Paul/Ricky Rice/Robert Gibson went to a double DQ against Tijo Khan, Soldad Ustinov & Manny Fernandez; in a mat classic, Masa Saito defeated Curt Hennig (1983).

(MEMPHIS/SYNDICATED) - Arena highlights: Tommy Gilbert loses by DQ to Dutch Mantell after Robert Fuller's run-in, after which, Fuller turns on Gilbert; Jeff Jarrett is turned on by Senshe during tag match with Fuller/Jim Golden.

(SOUTHERN) - Buck Robley pinned Mr. Wrestling II in a horrible Bunkhouse lumberjack match; Tommy Rich/Steve Pritchard took a DQ over Dick Slater/Manny Fernandez when Snake Brown powdered Rich.

(USA) - Arena match: Wendall Cooley drew with Buddy Landell; Studio: The Bullet (Bob Armstrong) won a DQ over Bill Dundee when Gumby chloroformed Bullet from behind. Bullet unmasked but face not shown.

(WWF) - On SUPERSTARS, Powers of Pain debuted with a pin over Tony Ulysses and Mike Sharpe; On CHALLENGE, a Brother Love seg with King Haku & Heenan which died.

(NWA) - On TBS, recaps of the Bash PPV and a challenge by Jim Cornette (see below); On WORLD WIDE & NWA PRO, all squashes but Jim Ross investigates the organizing of "The Council," Gary Hart's new group (Perez/Zbyszko/Ronnie Garvin); on MAIN EVENT, all repeat matches: Barry Windham over Mighty Wilbur; Perez loses a DQ to Bobby Fulton; Nikita/Steve Williams double DQ with Midnight Express

LINE OF THE WEEK---1. Ken Wayne, on Continental, talking about Aug. 22 match vs. Danny Davis: "I have the law firm of Howard-Fine-and-Howard drawing up my stipulations." (He wouldn't be talking about the 3 Stooges, would he?); 2. Jim Ross, on TBS, discussing another hapless victim of The Road Warriors: "We'll send a video cassette of this to his next of kin."

BLOOPER OF THE WEEK---NWA MAIN EVENT, for repeating a Windham-Wilbur match that had Ronnie Garvin making the save for Wilbur, just one week AFTER he does a run-in to give Windham the win over Dusty at the Bash PPV.

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COMINGS & GOINGS (cont.)

At the end of TBS interview Saturday, Cornette said the only challenge left for the Midnights was the World Tag Team Championship and "it's hard to get that when you can never get a match with the champions." Might we see a Midnights-Tully & Arn battle on CLASH III Sept. 7 on TBS???

It looks like Bob Backlund may indeed now take on Akira Maedea in a future Japan UWF match. But Maeda is really after Steve Williams & Rick Steiner.

That II-Robley match on Southern either showed how badly II has slipped or how terrible Robley has always been. It was one of the ten worst of the year

Happy pinfalls..... Steve